

**REMARKS**

After entry of the above amendments, claims 2-6, 15, 18 and 22 are pending in this application. Applicants have amended claims 2-6, 15 and 18 and have added new claim 22. No new matter has been added.

The Examiner rejected claim 20 under 35 USC 101 because the claimed invention was allegedly directed to non-statutory subject matter. Applicants have canceled claim 20 and this rejection is now moot.

The Examiner rejected claims 2-6, 15, 18 and 20 under 35 USC 103(a) as being unpatentable over Sick U.S. Patent Pub. No. 2003/0216971. Applicants respectfully traverse this rejection with respect to claims 2-6, 15 and 18, as amended.

Applicants' invention comprises a number of elements in combination. In amended claim 3, for example, the claimed system includes a plurality of office automation devices arranged in a work place and connected via a network to a server for managing each of the office automation devices. Each of the office automation devices includes a verification means for verifying a user attempting to operate each of the devices and belonging to a predetermined section of the work place. Also included is an information acquisition means for acquiring device usage information, including information of a user verified by the verification means, and a value indicating an amount of usage of the device by the verified user. There is also an information storage means for sequentially storing the device usage information acquired by the information acquisition means.

The management server includes an information collection means for collecting, via a network, device usage information stored in the information storage means for each of the devices and an amount totalizing means for totalizing a usage amount record of the devices. The usage amount record is associated with each user or a section in a company based on the usage information collected by the information collection means.

In contrast, Sick discloses a system that facilitates selling, purchasing, analyzing and managing energy resources. The Examiner asserts that it would have been obvious to utilize Sick's system for managing devices in an energy monitoring environment, which mainly deals with power consumption, to include other usage monitoring of individual devices in a network in terms of device life and amount of usage. Applicants respectfully disagree. Contrary to the Examiner's assertion, Sick's device is entirely different from applicants' invention. For example, Sick's device merely obtains usage statistics from gas or electricity meters and does not totalize the amount of usage made by a verified device user, as in the claimed invention. Sick's disclosure is devoid of any teaching or suggestion that would have motivated one skilled in the art to modify the reference or to combine reference teachings to arrive at the claimed invention.

Accordingly, the invention claimed is patentable over the prior art, and claim 3 should be allowed. This logic also disposes of the rejections of claims 2 and 4-6, which depend directly from claim 3. Claims 15 and 18 should also be allowed due to the amendments that clearly show that the totalized usage amount is associated with each user or section in a company.

In view of the above, each of the presently pending claims in this application is believed to be in immediate condition for allowance. Accordingly, the Examiner is respectfully requested to withdraw the outstanding rejection of the claims and to pass this application to issue. If it is determined that a telephone conference would expedite the prosecution of this application, the Examiner is invited to telephone the undersigned at the number given below.

In the event the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office determines that an extension and/or other relief is required, applicant petitions for any required relief including extensions of time and authorizes the Commissioner to charge the cost of such petitions and/or other fees due in connection with the filing of this document to Deposit Account No. 03-1952 referencing docket no. 116692000300.

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Respectfully submitted,

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